DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 279 154 FL 016 346

AUTHOR Giauque, Gerald S.
TITLE Avoiding Teacher-Tester Burn-Out in Oral Testing.
PUB DATE Jul 85
NOTE 23p.; A shorter version of this paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Teachers of French (Montreal, Canada, July 1985).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Achievement Tests; Audiolingual Skills; *Audiotape Recordings; Dictation; *Language Proficiency; *Language Tests; Pronunciation; Second Language Instruction; Teacher Burnout; *Test Format; *Test Use; *Verbal Tests

ABSTRACT

The oral proficiency interview should be administered infrequently, but there are other measures than can be used between interviews to maintain oral proficiency and achievement as the organizing principles of instruction while placing fewer demands on the teacher/tester. One such measure is a semi-direct procedure that has two steps. First, students simultaneously follow written instructions, answer written questions, and record their responses on tape without stopping the recording. The students then rewind their tapes and transcribe exactly their responses. The tester listens to the tape and corrects the transcript, scoring the student's performance on the basis of errors uncorrected by the student, errors corrected by the student, pronunciation errors, and errors in accent marks. The method is accurate, reduces stress on the tester, allows measurement of overall performance while forgiving momentary lapses, and tests speaking, writing, and listening comprehension. Graduate students can administer and score it. Its disadvantages are that the mechanical aspect can be intimidating to some students, the test can not be personalized, and it requires a language laboratory with dual tracking capabilities. The method of administering the test can and should vary, but frequent oral testing is useful in reinforcing the principle of oral proficiency. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED279154

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Giauque

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

AVOIDING TEACHER-TESTER BURN-OUT IN ORAL TESTING

Gerald S. Giauque

Northern Arizona University

A shorter version of this paper was given at the AATF Meeting in Montreal, July 1985.

FL016346

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Special Note to :

Reviewers, Editor and typesetter(s):

On pages 9 and 10, certain "corrections" appear in black ink. Both the errors and the corrections are intentional. Please do not replace the errors with the corrections. The material which appears in black ink should be hand-written in. Thank you.

AVOIDING TEACHER-TESTER BURN-OUT IN ORAL TESTING

ABSTRACT

A great deal has already been said about adapting principles of teaching for oral proficiency. Many members of the profession also now realize that the greatest value of the proficiency movement is the impetus oral testing, both for proficiency and achievement, can give to our everyday teaching/classroom management. The intent of this paper is to discuss some practical aspects of implementing oral proficiency/achievement tests through testing procedures which will help reduce teacher-tester burnout.

AVOIDING TEACHER-TESTER BURN-OUT IN ORAL TESTING

PART I: The role of Oral testing in Today's Foreign Language Curriculum: A Brief Overview.

A great deal has already been said about adapting principles of teaching for oral proficiency to the classroom.[1] It is commonly known among members of the profession that these principles have grown out of the oral proficiency interview (OPI) developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and the Educational Testing Service (ETS). Many members of the profession also now realize that the greatest value of the proficiency movement is the impetus oral testing both for proficiency and achievement can give to our everyday teaching and classroom management. The intent of this paper is to discuss some practical aspects of implementing oral proficiency and achievement tests.

This paper assumes that the reader has a good knowledge of the ACTFL/ETS Oral Proficiency Interview. The intent of the paper is provide ideas on ways that oral testing can be incorporated into secondary school and college foreign language (FL) courses, primarily but not necessarily restricted to first and second year courses.

A teacher or professor should not give an OPI everytime he gives an oral test. Although there has been a great deal of writing about oral proficiency, this aspect of OPI needs to be stressed.[2] Once this caveat has been established, the question arises: when should an OPI be administered, and what other kinds of tests, in addition to the OPI, should be administered?

The proficiency interview should be administered rarely, perhaps once a semester if that often, and preferably by someone other than the teacher.[3] But this does not mean that there should not be any other oral testing during the rest of the semester, nor that such testing cannot be administered to one's own class. The title of Higgs' book, Teaching for Oral Proficiency, the Organizing Principle, suggests that principles of oral proficiency should undergird our teaching practices, and one may infer that they should likewise undergird all our testing practices as well. To test for oral proficiency at the end of the semester suggests that we should test for oral proficiency at several points during the semester. But if the OPI is "out of bounds" during the semester, an answer must be found for the question "How can one test for oral proficiency at other points during the semester and particularly without 'nearly killing' oneself?" This paper proposes an answer to that question.

The OPI is an integrative test; it tests proficiency; it is a face-to-face interview (or direct test). But it is possible to devise tests that test oral skills which are not integrative (i.e., that are discrete, or "semi-discrete," as will be explained later); tests can be devised to test achievement; they can also be "less than direct" tests, i.e., semi-direct or indirect, not face-to-face. But they can still test oral skill. The important aspect of the OPI, in the opinion of the present writer, is neither "interview," nor "proficiency;" it is the first word: "oral." The testing of foreign language students should most definitely include an oral component, but we should not interpret this to mean that every test should be an OPI.

There is comparatively little in the literature about oral testing that is not "direct," i.e., that is not an interview. Larson[4] describes semi-direct testing of two university language classes: students were asked questions via a tape recorder and recorded their answers on cassette tapes. The tester then listened to and graded the tests. Larson also analyzed the affective aspects of semi-direct testing and found mixed attitudes toward it: Some students (indeed, one class) favored it, whereas others (another class) did not. Clark[5] describes a variety of semi-direct testing formats to test English speaking proficiency in the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) candidates.

The test stimuli, as in the case of Larson, were delivered by tape recorder, and examinee speech was recorded for evaluation. In one of the most thorough articles on the subject, Frink[6] explains a modified face-to-face test format which sounds appealing, but which includes one aspect of the semi-direct method: i.e., the oral face-to-face oral exam is recorded for future reference.

Tests such as these are admittedly less "realistic" than the face-to-face interview, but they do provide the tester with information concerning the student's ability to use the target language orally. Such tests are also less pscyhological draining on the tester since they can be evaluated at his convenience. In addition, he can rewind a tape and listen to large or small portions of it more than once, or he can go back and re-evaluate a test in light of other tests. Finally, such tests, although they may cause additional test-stress on the student at the moment the test is administered, can actually be a source of assurance to the student who is concerned about the objectivity of oral tests, particularly about direct tests. If the tester is willing to allow the student to contest the results of a test by granting him the right to listen to his own tape, questions about what the student really said, as opposed to what he thought he said, can be more easily resolved. If the student speaks into a live microphone, both student and

tester can easily determine what was actually said.

But even the semi-direct tests described here can be improved, in the opinion of this author. The remainder of this paper is the description of another procedure for testing oral proficiency.

PART II: Description of a Semi-Direct Oral Testing Procedure.

At Northern Arizona University, the Department of Modern Languages is fortunate to have a long tradition of testing for oral proficiency.[7] The department was involved in the training of Peace Corps volunteers in Spanish in the late 1960's and early 1970's, and a spin-off of that was the establishment of a semester-long intensive Spanish program in the department. Oral interviews, based primarily on the Foreign Service Interview (FSI) were an important part of that intensive program. In addition, in 1978 the department acquired a small language lab (15 positions) with dual-track cassette tape recorders, which made it possible for students to hear a voice played on a cassette tape at the console and simultaneously record their own voices. This lab made it possible to implement the semi-direct oral testing procedure which will now be described.

The following instruction sheet is distri ted to the students:

Oral Exam

Instructions

A. Do not begin until you are told to begi

B. When you are told to begin, pronounce our name and today's date, which is _____ ___.

C. Pronounce the number of your booth. You'll find that number next to the tape recorder. W te that same number here _____.

D. Read each of the sentences on th test sheet out loud. Answer question number one orally b fore reading question number two.

E. You may re-read a question ou loud if you were not pleased with the way you pronoun ed it the first time. After you have read the questio , answer the question. Speak naturally. You may repea yourself if you want to. If you make what you feel is a mistake, repeat your answer to correct it. I repeat, spe k naturally. DO NOT STOP the tape recorder until you FINISH THE TEST! I CAN HEAR YOU STOP YOUR TAPE RECORDER WHEN I LISTEN TO YOUR TAPE.

Re-read these instructions and feel free to ask me any questions.
I will now distribute the test sheet. Do NOT not begin until I tell you to begin.

After the students have read the instruction sheet, they receive another sheet on which is written anywhere from 3 to 10 questions, depending on the general level of proficiency of the class (i.e., whether the test is being given shortly after the beginning of the first semester of study, or near the end of the sixth semester). The questions reflect one of two points of view: they may be based on material they have specifically studied in class, or they may be based on the kinds of questions that reflect one of the levels of the OPI, i.e., novice, intermediate, advanced or, rarely, superior. Following is a list of test questions devised to test students who should be at approximately the intermediate level:

1. Comment vous appelez-vous?
2. Dans quelle ville et quel état habitez-vous?
3. Parlez-moi de votre ville ou de votre état. Décrivez-la ou le.
4. Décrivez les membres de votre famille.
5. Quels âges ont-ils, les membres de votre famille?

END OF TEST

Just after the test is distributed to the students, but before all the tape recorders are turned on simultaneously, the students are reminded to state their name and the date before they read question no. 1.

As each student finishes speaking and turns off his recorder, the tester passes out another piece of paper, on which the following instructions are written:

F. Here are more instructions. Rewind your cassette tape back until the counter is zero. Then LISTEN to your own voice. Use a paper and pencil to WRITE EXACTLY what you said on tape. (Do not, however, write the questions; write ONLY your answers). Write exactly what you said, even any errors you may have made. You MAY stop and rewind the tape as often as you like in order to listen to your test. IMPORTANT: WRITE ON EVERY OTHER LINE OF YOUR PAPER, not on EVERY line. Leave lots of space between the words. Write largely enough and clearly enough that your test is legible. Write out in letters any numbers that you have pronounced. Go back and re-read these instructions. Then begin to transcribe your test to paper. Do not read part G of the instructions until after you have transcribed your tape.

G. After you finis' transcribing your test exactly as you pronounced it, rea' through it. Using a pen of a different color, circle any ord(s) in which you might have made errors, and write the CORRECT word(s) ABOVE the incorrect word(s). Correc' all of the test in this manner NOW.

Followin' is the transcription of the oral semi-direct test, writte' by the student. The student has copied exactly what he heard himself say. The text contains several err'rs and no corrections have been made.

1. Je m'appelle John Smith
2. J'habite en Phoenix, dans l'état de la Arizona.
3. Phoenix est une joli ville mais il est trés chaude. J'aime le chaud, mais j'aime nagez aussi. Phoenix est une trés grande ville, mais il n'est pas spectaculaire.
4. J ai quatre personnes dans ma famille. Mon pére, mon mére. moi et ma petit soeur.
5. Mon pére a quarante quatre ans, ma mére a quarante deux ans, j'ai dix-neuf et ma soeur a dix-sept.

Following is the same student's writing, after the ester has read the student's transcription of the oral

test. Normally the tester will mark any additional required corrections using a pen of yet a different color.

1. Je m'appelle John Smith
2. J'habite ~~en~~ Phoenix, dans l'état de l~~a~~'Arizona.
3. Phoenix est une joli~~e~~ ville mais il ~~est~~ fait très chaud~~e~~. J'aime l~~e~~ cha~~nd~~ leur, mais j'aime nage~~z~~ r aussi. Phoenix est une très grande ville, mais il n'est pas spectaculaire.
4. ~~J'ai~~ Il y a quatre personnes dans ma famille: Mon père, m~~o~~a~~n~~ mère, moi et ma petit~~e~~ soeur.
5. Mon père a quarante-quatre ans, ma mère a quarante-deux ans, j'ai dix-neuf ans et ma soeur a dix-sept ans.

How is such a test scored? The present writer has decided on a somewhat arbitrary method:

1. Uncorrected errors in written morphology = -2
2. Errors in grammar the student corrects himself =-1
3. Errors in pronunciation ascertained by the tester while the tester listens to the tape = -1/2
4. Errors in accent marks = -1/2

The number of points taken off is totaled and the students are ranked according to the inverse order of the number of points deducted. The top 25% of the students receive "A," the next 35% receive "B," the next 30% receive "C" and the bottom 10% receive "D." No failing grades are given on this test.

PART III: Advantages of the proposed semi-direct test.

What are the advantages of this "indirect" oral test, as it has been called?

First, the tester can read the student-generated text/test and determine the degree of correctness of the student's grammar more rapidly and with less psychological and mental strain or boredom than if he listened to the student, either on tape or in a face-to-face interview. In addition, an interview-test often takes a long time to administer because the student often pauses between utterances. But a tester can read a student's test/text faster than he can listen to it. He can determine if the student is capable of performing at a certain level of the functional trisection, even if he momentarily experiences a memory lapse as he is speaking: A correction in writing in the appropriate place will appear on the student's text/test. But if there is a high probability that he truly cannot perform at a particular level, linguistic breakdown will only occur not while he is speaking but also in the writing phase of the test too. Less rigorous than an OPI, the test nevertheless reveals areas of strength and weakness of the student's control of the language.

Secondly, it is obvious that the test serves not only as a speaking test, but also as a writing test and to a lesser

degree, as a listening comprehension test. The test is truly efficient since it kills several birds with one stone. The possibility for objectivity and "re-evaluation" is increased when the test is recorded both on tape and as a transcription. The test can be kept until the end of the semester, if desired, and played for the student to show him how much (or how little!) he has progressed. Other teachers can consult the test and learn very rapidly the particular problem areas of students whom they may be "inheriting" from those students' previous teacher. Most appealing to university professors is the possibility that this "tape-recorded-student-transcribed-oral test" (TRSTOT) offers to have the testing procedure corrected almost entirely by graduate students, thus freeing up professors for research activities. Graduate assistants can be trained to evaluate (1) the transcribed portion of the test as if it were a composition and (2) the pronunciation and fluency aspects of the taped recording as if it were a live interview. OPI criteria can be taught to the evaluators (i.e., the graduate assistants), who can practice making evaluations by listening to tapes and reading transcriptions as often as is necessary. In fact, this procedure may well be the most efficient method of promoting OPI and oral proficiency in general among future teachers.

Thirdly, the present writer has found through experience,

that by consulting the written version of the test, generated by the student, that in the case of the very best students and the very worst students,the amount of time necessary to listen to the tape is decreased. The written work speaks clearly enough. This is very definitely an advantage for a teacher who is very busy and/or has a large number of students.

What are some of the disadvantages of this test? First, certain students are intimidated by mechanical testing devices. These students find it difficult to pretend that they are speaking to someone when they are really only speaking into a microphone. A face-to-face OPI interview can be administered to those students who exhibit anxiety in a tape-recording booth. Occasionally students face another problem: they sit in booths made of metal, which increases echos in the absence of carpet on the floor or walls. On the other hand, some might observe that this "diversion" makes the test only more authentic --if a student can perform well under less than optimum conditions, then he really knows the material. When such students were offered the opportunity of a direct test at NAU, (about one in 12 students tested had a problem), very few of them opted for a personal oral interview. Even though they do not like the tape recorder, they like a face-to-face interview even less.

A second disadvantage of the procedure outlined here is that this test cannot be personalized, which is what one could do with an individual face-to-face, one-on-one direct oral proficiency interview. If, at the beginning of the year in first-year French, one student registers late, evades the placement exam, signs up for first semester French, and demonstrates by the ease and fluency with which he passes the first test, that he is certainly not a novice, there is no way of probing his real capacity with this test. A face-to-face oral interview to establish his real proficiency level is then arranged in such cases at NAU.

Finally, to implement this kind of a test requires a language lab with dual track recording capability. In such circumstances this author recommends giving the oral components of tests and quizzes in the hall and having students come out, one at a time, to talk for 5 short minutes -- or less, while others work on another assignment. Taping of these conversations is possible, but being faced with both a human tester and a tape recorder an be excessive for some students. The present procedure of group testing students, rather than one at a time, in this modified oral skill mode is superior.

Larson distinguishes between direct oral testing and semi-direct oral testing. Direct oral testing is the genuine oral proficiency interview, in which one or more

testers actually interview(s) the examinee. In semi-direct testing the test "elicits active speech by the examinee through means such as tape recordings. . .or [other] techniques other than direct face-to-face interviews." Larson lists advantages and disadvantages of semi-direct tests, many of which are different than those listed in this paper. In the semi-direct method he describes and has tested, the tester followed a procedure that has probably been used before by other proponents of oral testing: that is, the test questions were not written, but were pronounced on tape by the tester. Students had a certain amount but not an unlimited amount of time to respond. In addition, correcting the tests meant listening to them, including the test questions spoken by the tester. Although not as time consuming as a direct test, such a test may, by its repetitive nature, still create burn-out.

PART IV: Does a teacher have the right to give an oral test that does not explicitly follow the format of the OPI? Or in other words, does he or she have the right to administer indirect oral tests?

The original OPI test, the FSI test, was developed by the government for government use. Under that format generally, the candidate and the evaluator have never seen

each other before and will never see each other again. The evaluator is supposed to determine the level of proficiency within the space of 20 to 30 minutes. In the academic setting, however, the evaluator is usually also the teacher, and knows the students and sees them over long periods of time. The present author thinks that the philosophy of the testing procedure is not a dogma. It can be revised to accommodate the important difference between government language testing and academic language testing. When one has few students to grade, and/or when the quality of oral proficiency varies greatly from one student to the next, as might be the case in advanced classes, a face-to-face interview would be more appropriate than in first year classes, where oral proficiency is not likely to be higher than the Intermediate level. At the lower levels, the difference between a proficiency test and an achievement test are minimal. The TRSTOT might be used effectively during the second year of university instruction too, but near the end of the second year, as student proficiency increases, a face-to-face interview would be appropriate. Some writers suggest that an OPI test once or twice a year is sufficient. Rather than give a mid term test and a final test in first year courses, it is recommended that five medium sized tests per semester be administered, which comes out to about one every 3-1/2 to 4 weeks. A full-blown OPI

is obviously not given in connection with each one, but each test does include an oral component. This frequency of oral testing helps to keep building oral skill the organizing principle of the course.

Conclusions. The thrust of this paper has been to offer a broader perspective to oral testing. The method of administering such a test may and should vary. It is hypothesized that a face-to-face oral interview may not be optimal in all situations. When constraints of time and human resources make the face-to-face interview difficult, mechanical resources should be utilized. By administering less demanding oral tests more frequently, teachers can more effectively make and keep oral proficiency and achievement the organizing principle of the profession.

Works Cited

[1]James, Charles J., Editor. Foreign Language Proficiency in the Classroom and Beyond. Higgs, Theodore V., Editor. Teaching for Proficiency, the Organizing Principle. Both published in the ACTFL Foreign Language Education Series, National Textbook Company, Lincolnwood, Illinois. 1985 and 1984.

[2]Certain researchers have given more than one OPI during a semester, probably in an effort to implement oral proficiency as one of the basic tenets of the course. Bette Hirsch, "A Proficiency-Based French Conversation Course," The French Review, 59(1985), 210-18. Walter K. Francke, "Individual Oral Exams," Die Unterrichtspraxis, 5(1972), 150-52.

[3]Dorothy James, "Toward Realistic Objectives in Foreign Language Teaching," ADFL Bulletin, 16(1985), 9-12.

[4]Jerry W. Larson, "Testing Speaking Ability in the Classroom: The Semi-Direct Alternative," Foreign Language Annals, 17(1984), 499-507.

[5]Helen H. Frink, "Oral Testing for First Year Classes," Foreign Language Annals, 14(1982), 281-86.

[6]John L. D. Clark, and Spencer S. Swinton, "An Exploration of Speaking Proficiency Measures in the TOEFL Context, Report 4,." Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey 08541, 1979. Also available through ERIC, ED 201 641.

[7]Manuel C. Rodriguez, "Current Status of O.P.I. in Intensive Language Programs," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southwest Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Colorado Springs, CO, March 1-3, 1984. Available through ERIC, ED 242 220.